



# News Release

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## **Prevent tragedies on the water this Memorial Day weekend, all summer**

*Supervise children playing near water; always wear a life jacket*

**OLYMPIA** — Swimming and boating can be fun for the entire family — as long as safety and avoiding disaster come first. In 2008, 100 people drowned in Washington waters; men are three times more likely than women to drown in the state.

In May and early June, lakes and rivers across the state can be particularly dangerous. Unless you're highly experienced or with a professional touring group you should stay away from rivers during this time. Professionals know the rivers and will know the locations of treacherous logjams, which are common in the spring.

"Drowning is a tragedy that often can be prevented," says Mary Borges, Safe Kids Washington coalition director. "It starts with each boater. Everyone who gets on a boat should wear a life jacket that's approved by the U.S. Coast Guard. Making it a habit could save your life."

Washington waters are cold enough to cause hypothermia even on the hottest summer day; it can weaken the strongest swimmer. Know your limits — drowning often happens when someone tires while swimming.

Always wear a life jacket around water bodies and on boats. Make sure it fits properly. State law says all children 12 and under must wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket or vest on all vessels 19 feet and under.

Parents can teach children by example when it comes to boating and water safety. According to a Safe Kids Worldwide study released in 2005, kids are much more likely to practice safe habits when they see similar behavior by parents and caregivers.

“Parents can really influence their kids. They’ll see and embrace your safety habits,” says Borges. Parents should keep children within immediate reach when near any type of water, and always properly supervise them.

River boaters should know and practice river rescue techniques. They should know how to handle water craft with proper use of motors, paddles, and oars. Boaters should also be trained in rescue skills, first aid and CPR, and should be able to recognize and treat hypothermia — a condition in which a person’s body temperature drops well below normal.

Symptoms of hypothermia may include uncontrolled shivering, slow or unclear speech, confusion, and unconsciousness. The very young and elderly are more likely to develop hypothermia. It can develop very quickly in cold waters. [Ways to prevent hypothermia](http://www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/generefactsheets/hypothermia.pdf) (www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/generefactsheets/hypothermia.pdf) are on the Department of Health’s Web site.

Alcohol use while swimming and boating is a bad idea. Drinking alcohol can also make a person more vulnerable to hypothermia.

More [information about drowning prevention](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/classes-community/community-programs/drowning-prevention) (www.seattlechildrens.org/classes-community/community-programs/drowning-prevention) is available online.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for a healthy dose of information.
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